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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a study that compared the attitudes of White university students toward African American students and discusses their perceptions about the classroom and campus environments. The study revealed that White students who had shared a dormitory room with a person of a different racial group and evaluated the experience as good, expressed more positive attitudes about African American people than those who labelled their experiences as bad. Similarly, White students who were enrolled in classes taught by African American instructors expressed less hostility toward African American students. Positive attitudes toward African American students were related to White students' expressions of positive self-confidence, a sense of security in the academic environment, appreciation of interracial interactions, and recognition of contributions by women to academia. Contains 16 references. (Author/GLR)

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WHITE STUDENT ATTITUDES ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

Bekele Molla and Franklin D. Westbrook

Research Report #9-90

COUNSELING CENTER
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COLLEGE PARK, MARYLAND

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Summary

This study compares the attitudes of White university students toward African American students and discusses their perceptions about the classroom and campus environments. White students who had shared a dormitory room with a person of a different racial group and evaluated the experience as good, expressed more positive attitudes about African American people than those who labelled their experiences as bad. Similarly, White students who were enrolled in classes taught by African American instructors expressed less hostility toward African American students. Positive attitudes toward African American students were related to White students' expressions of positive self-confidence; a sense of security in the academic environment; appreciation of inter-racial interactions and recognition of contributions by women to academia.

WHITE STUDENT ATTITUDES ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN A UNIVERSITY SETTING

During the past several years college student attrition has been a major concern. The end of the baby boom, an unstable economy, and changes in employment patterns across industry in general have caused severe drops in the numbers of high school graduates who apply to college. The drops in applicants have been accompanied by shifts toward fields in which specialization at the undergraduate level is common (Astin, 1975; Tinto, 1975; and Noel, 1978).

While the general undergraduate is in flux, a catastrophe is in the making for African Americans. The minority student percentage of the general college student population is increasing, but the African American student population is decreasing (Wilson & Melendez, 1986). In some institutions heavy attrition rates (60% to 75%) keep the percentage of African American students enrolled relatively low, and the graduation percentages even lower.

Wilson & Melendez (1986) state that a strong "high school grade point average, well developed study skills, completion of a college preparatory curriculum, high college achievement scores, higher than average parental education and income, enrollment as a freshman at certain, selected four-year institutions, students' motivation to succeed, living on campus, and not having outside employment are highly correlated with college persistence."

These are, however, characteristics of a limited group of college graduates rather than requirements for retention and graduation. As a matter of fact, Tracey & Sedlacek (1987) show that there is virtually no relationship between the Scholastic Aptitude Test scores and high school and college graduation rates for either majority or minority students. They have established that non-cognitive variables such as a positive self concept, realistic self appraisal, understanding how to deal with racism, etc., account for more of the variance related to minority student retention than cognitive variables. There is, however, a question as to what extent the climate of primarily White universities affects African American student retention.

Korolewicz & Korolewicz (1985) and Clark, Windley, Jones, & Ellis (1984) found that African American students fantasize about pleasant and trusting relationships with White students. They find white students reflecting a willingness to accept them as students, but a reversal in their beliefs about positive characteristics in African Americans and a growing unwillingness to accept them as intimates. African American students report relatively good relations with white students in classrooms but no contact outside. They report frequent exposure to racial discrimination from faculty, staff, and students (Allen, Joyce, & Taylor 1982).

Sedlacek (1985) compared African American and white students' attitudes on eight variables which ranged from how residence hall housekeepers (most of whom are African Americans)

are treated by students to the racial orientation of residence hall programming. Minatoya & Sedlacek (1981) and Carter, White, & Sedlacek (1987) found that Whites held significantly negative attitudes about African Americans in situations that require either physical closeness, interpersonal interactions, or competition. White students express more positive attitudes about African Americans in service roles. So while White students may be willing to see African American students in college, they see them as being inferior, and they expect them to remain and act inferior.

This study will assess the attitudes of White students toward African American students on a number of selected national opinion survey items and others derived from a Campus Environment Survey (Leonard, 1985) which was designed specifically to assess a campus climate. A comparison of African American and white students' attitudes gives some hints as to how far apart they are, and how unlikely it is that they will enter into accepting and supportive relationships.

Research Questions

1. Do White students, who have been taught by African American instructors, differ in their attitudes toward African Americans from those who have not had similar experiences?
2. Do White students, who express varying degrees of satisfaction about their experiences while they lived with a roommate whose race was different from their own, have similar feelings about their: (a) personal safety and

potential as a student? (b) security and self-confidence in the classroom?

3. Do white students, who express varying degrees of satisfaction about their experiences while they lived with a roommate whose race was different from their own, have similar feelings about the:(a) availability of environmental reinforcements? (b) potential for sexual harassment?

4. Do White students, who express varying degrees of satisfaction about their experiences while they lived with a roommate whose role was different from their own, show attitudes which may be characterized as symbolic discriminatory feeling expressed through: (a) resentment of perceived achievements by African American people? (b) depreciation of contributions by women?

5. Do white students, who express varying degrees of satisfaction about their experiences while they lived with a roommate whose race was different from their own, show attitudes which may be characterized as regressive discriminatory feelings through resentment of: (a) close interracial interactions? (b) the presence of minority groups on campus? (c) equal access to accommodations?

METHOD

Subjects

Six hundred and nineteen students were selected from a pool of 1169 subjects who completed the Student Opinion Survey (SOS)

during the Fall Semester of 1984. Five hundred and forty-one were white, 105 were African American, and 78 did not indicate their race. Fifty percent (N=307) were female and 49 percent (N=303) were males. One percent did not indicate their sex. The students voluntarily participated in the study.

Procedures

Initially, a random list of large lower division (enrollments of 150 and up) classes and upper division (enrollment of 50 and up) classes that met at 10:00 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday was obtained from the Records and Registration Office. Sufficient numbers of classes to yield 1500 students were identified. Since only eight to 10 percent of these students were expected to be African American, sufficient upper and lower division Afro-American Studies classes to yield 150 additional African American students were identified.

Letters were sent to 18 professors from the list mentioned above asking for their assistance in the study and telling them they would be contacted by telephone by one of the investigators. Although all of the professors agreed to participate, the instruments were administered in twelve classes by the regular professors and their teaching assistants. Professors were given printed instructions and instrument packets, answer sheets, and pencils.

For the purpose of data analysis students who were thought to have been on campus long enough to have developed relatively stable opinions about the campus environment, i.e., sophomores,

juniors, and seniors, and who had completed both sections of the instrument were selected (N=619).

For the first set of analyses the groups were named for the content area of the classes in which they were tested. The experimental groups are mathematics and science (Group 1), applied science and mathematics (Group 2), social and behavioral science (Group 3), and arts and humanities (Group 4). A fifth group was made up of African American students, regardless of the class in which they were tested.

For the second set of analyses data were used from White student groups who said they had lived with a roommate whose race was different from their own. These students rated the interracial experience either good (N=46), bad (N=57), or marginal (n=55).

Instruments

Items from the Students' Opinion Questionnaire (SOQ) (McConahay, Hardee, & Batts, 1981) and the Campus Environment Survey (Leonard, 1985) were used to develop instruments used in this study. The SOQ is a collection of opinion survey items that social psychologists have administered over the past 25 years in slightly different variations to groups of students and non-students (Sears and Kinder, 1971; Taylor, Sheatsley & Greenly, 1978). The items are a part of the psychological literature on racism and have been found to represent attitudes, ideas, and behaviors which motivate individuals to act in ways

that deliver negative outcomes to persons and groups against whom the acts are directed (Sears and Kinder, 1971).

Although the items on the SOQ were deemed to be adequate as far as they went, in a few instances, items were thought to be too general for interpretation at the level of precision desired. The SOQ also lacked items that would address some important issues that are specific to a typical university campus. An example of an excessively general item is one which originally said, "I favor strong open housing laws that permit minority persons to rent or purchase housing even when the owner does not wish to rent or sell." Because students do not typically purchase real property from a university, the item, in the context of this study, is too general.

Another example is to be found in the general use of the word "minority." Minority is a generic term which is appropriately used in reference to a collection of minority groups, but which is inappropriately used in place of the specific group for which the statement is intended. Because this study relates specifically to problems expressed by African Americans,the collective noun "minority" is not used when African Americans are the referent. Subsequently, an instrument, the Study Opinion Survey (SOS), specific to the needs of this study Was developed.

The SOS was designed to assess the attitudes of White students toward African American students, and people of African decent in general, and to ascertain White and African American

students' assessment of the campus environment. Thus, the SOS is composed of two parts: (1) The Racial Attitude Scale (RAS) and, (2) The Campus Environment Survey (CES).

The Racial Attitude Scale (RAS, Part 1, of the SOS) is composed of 36 items. The items are divided into four sub-scales- National Modern (6); National Traditional (6); Local Modern (6); and Local Traditional (6). The national items have been administered over the past 25 years by the NORC to large areas. The twelve local items are parallel items developed to specifically relate to university campus structures, organizations, and student interactions. Twelve filler items were designed to break the intensity of the race related items, a procedure used by McConahay, Hardee, and Batts (1981). Pearson r test-retest correlation coefficients for the Modern and Traditional items were .72 and .75, respectively. The Pearson r correlation coefficient between NORC and locally developed items was .75.

The CES (Part 2 of the SOS) is an 86 item, locally constructed survey which is still under development, but it has attained sufficiently high reliability -- Pearson r test-retest correlation coefficients of .88 and .84, and item reliability that range from .13 to .82 with a median of .57 -- to be used in this research. The 59 item version of the CES used in this research has reliability that range from .50 to .82 with a median of .61, with all items that attained coefficients below .50 eliminated.

Results

Previous research with populations similar to this one (McConahay et al., 1981) and with more heterogeneous populations have shown that the items assessing traditional and modern racism could be summed to form reliable Likert-type scales. Hence, the individual items on the RAS were summed (after reversing the scores of negative items) to form a six item scale of National Modern racism, a six item scale of Local Modern racism, and six item scale of National Traditional racism, and a six item scale of Local Traditional racism.

In order to answer the question: "Do White students differ in their reactions to the presence of African Americans on campus," a Multivariate Analysis of Variance was computed on the RAS by the four administrative groups. The MANOVA showed a significant difference among the groups ($p < .05$) for each of the Modern and Traditional variables with F's ranging from 2.349 to 29.067. In order to determine the source of the differences, Oneway ANOVA's with the LSD procedure were computed on each of the administrative groups.

On each of the scales except Local Modern, Group 4 differed significantly ($p < .05$) from the remaining groups. On the Local Modern variable, Group 4 differed significantly only from Group 3 (see Table 1).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Of the 158 students who said their current racial attitudes were not shaped by their experiences at the university that they are attending, 46 said they had roomed with a person whose race was different from their own, and the experience was a good one; 57 had roomed with a person whose race was different from their own, and it was not good a experience; and 55 had the same living experience, and their's was a marginal experience.

In order to answer the questions related to roommate experience and racial attitude and perceptions about the campus environment, the items of the RAS and the CES were factor analyzed using principle component analysis with varimax rotation. All of the factors with eigenvalues greater than one (1) were rotated resulting in ten factors. A minimum of a .40 coefficient was used in interpreting the factor loadings. The factors were named for the content of the highest loading items on the factors (Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

The subjects who had good experience expressed a greater degree of personal safety and potential as a student and a significantly greater degree ($p < .05$) of feelings of security in the classroom than those who had marginal experience.

Having a roommate whose race was different from one's own had a significant effect ($p < .05$) on the attitude of white students toward African Americans. White students who reported

having a good experience in inter-racial interactions expressed significantly ($p < .05$) less resentment of perceived achievement by African Americans than those who had a marginal experience. A greater proportion ($p < .05$) of students who had a good inter-racial experience than those who had a bad experience felt that appreciation of contributions by women was incorporated in their classroom experiences and instructional curricula.

Those students who had a good experience sharing a room with a person of another race expressed greater ($p < .001$) beliefs in inter-racial interactions and significantly less ($p < .05$) resentment of the presence of African Americans than those who had either bad or marginal experience. Those who had a good experience expressed greater degree ($p < .05$) of belief in equal access to housing and educational institutions than those who had a bad experience.

Student academic class (sophomore, junior, senior) did not make any difference in White student expressed self-confidence or attitude toward African Americans. However, female students who rated their roommate experience as marginal tended to show the strongest ($p < .05$) resentment of perceived achievement by African Americans.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Comparison of African American and White students' perceptions about themselves and the campus racial environment

showed variations in their responses. White students expressed less belief in equal access to housing and educational institutions; and less enthusiasm in their beliefs about inter-racial relationships than African American students. African American students expressed a greater degree of security and self-confidence in the classroom ($p < .01$) than White students.

DISCUSSION

The results in the present study support previous findings that certain groups of white persons have negative attitudes about African American students' presence on primarily white campuses. Since these data indicate that regardless of academic classification, white students' attitudes toward persons of African descent are negative it must be concluded that a part of the negative thinking relates precisely to what white student bring to campus from their homes and communities.

McConahay, Hardee and Batts (1981) found a form of negative attitudes that looks similar, but which surfaced in a condition of social desirability. They reported that lower division undergraduate students had negative attitudes toward African American persons which they would only express in the presence of a white instructor . An African American person in the teacher role motivated the same population of students to moderate their attitudes.

The present data show that sophomore junior and senior English majors, history students, and Afro-American Studies students (Group 4), the latter of which had taken courses from

African American instructors, showed attitudes which were significantly less negative than the attitudes of the other groups. However, as was found by McConahay et al.(1981), white students did not respond to the instruments differently as a function of the obviousness of the racial content of the items. That is, regardless of the administrative group, White students endorsed items, some of which had either traditionally overt or covert racist content that may be disguised as expressions of social etiquette or acceptable community norms of behavior (Taylor, et al., 1978).

These results point to a high correlation between the racial attitude of White students and their interpersonal interaction with African American faculty. White students who were in classes taught by Whites expressed more hostility towards African Americans than those in classes taught by African American instructors. White students, in African American instructors' classes, expressed less hostility in part because they may have felt that the positive responses were socially desirable or they may have developed positive attitudes towards African American instructors resulting from classroom interactions or knowledge acquired through the contents of the courses.

It is interesting that White students in social science content classes expressed the most negative attitudes toward African Americans on the Local Modern scale items. It is possible that these students did not recognize the racist content in the items. However, a more plausible explanation may be that

they based their responses on the reputation of African Americans discussed in their social science classes (Sears & Kinder, 1971). They may have reacted defensively because of the implications of the items to their personal lives. That is, they recognized the racist content of the items but rationalized their response according to the social etiquette principle as was first articulated by Taylor, et al. (1978).

There is, however, another level of negative feeling which cannot be conveniently tied to the home and community. That relates to the attitudes that are expressed by students who have had a minority student as a roommate. White students who had one of three qualities of experience while sharing a room with a minority student, i.e. good, marginal, or bad, reported significantly different reactions to the items. Those students who had a good experience appeared to be more self confident than the students who expressed doubt about the experience. They also appeared to be more confident of their potential for having a successful career. Although this might suggest a history of secure feelings or high self esteem, it could also relate to recent growth which is influenced by the living experience (Sedlacek,1985).

White students who had a good inter-racial experience expressed less resentment about the achievement of African American students, less concern for the latter being on campus, more confidence in their own classroom achievement, and more positive feelings about the academic environment in general than

those who had a bad experience. White females who had a marginal experience, were more resentful of African American achievements than White males in the same group. It appears that the underlying problems created by negative attitudes about African American students affect not only the African American student but also the confidence of the holder of the negative attitudes with respect to dealing with the academic environment. The institution may use the challenge of teaching White students how to cope with different racial or ethnic groups as a way of not only improving their general attitudes about other groups, but also as an avenue to enhance their self confidence and their perceptions about the institution.

The environmental problems which affect the self confidence of White students are also relevant to the self confidence of African American students. In general African American students who enroll in major universities come from families in which achievement of some sort is either supported and celebrated or both. They were often the academic stars in their high schools and were generally encouraged to attend college even when they were not properly prepared for the experiences that await them on predominantly White campuses. They came to campus with at least a veneer of confidence which they began to lose almost immediately mainly due to the prevailing negative attitudes covertly or overtly expressed by many Whites.

In classrooms, African Americans feel discouraged from speaking up. Not only do professors appear to disregard them but

classmates do not take them seriously. It is also their perception that when they make contributions to discussions in class White peers often either succeed in turning their comments into something social or professors attribute their comments (that cannot be turned aside) to White students.

The factors which suggest close interpersonal interactions between African American and white students present a clear difference of opinion between the two groups and between White students who had good experiences with African American roommates and those who had bad or marginal experiences. Clark et al (1986) found that African American students go to college expecting to establish positive relationships between themselves and White students. They find white students rejecting them and disputing African American students' experience of racism in the community. African American and white students differ on virtually every issue affecting their joint living experience (Sedlacek, 1985).

In general, African American students find white students disapproving of intimate relationships. White students reserve for themselves the right to choose neighbors by race and they take a position against full racial integration. White students tend to believe, despite the evidence, that African American students do not qualify intellectually to be in institutions of higher education with them. They also resent any efforts on the part of the institution to assure that African American students do not fail in their academic endeavors. They believe that such

efforts have diluted academic requirements and caused a general grade inflation. They also contend that African American students are responsible for most of the crime committed on campus.

The issues that African American students have to contend with are: learning coping strategies for dealing with hostile and rejecting attitudes of White students; becoming personally acquainted with some faculty sufficiently to be referred to in class to by name; understanding the varied methods of evaluation of classwork; acquiring effective academic skills and study strategies; developing a sense of being in control of their lives and fortunes; finding opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills and developing romantic relationships. It is also the responsibility of predominantly White institutions to design and implement programs that nurture positive inter-racial experiences for all students in and outside the classroom.

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Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviations for Local and National Modern and Traditional Opinion items by Administrative Groups

	Group 1			Group 2			Group 3			Group 4		
	X	SD	N	X	SD	N	X	SD	N	X	SD	N
Local Modern	3.39	.48	41	3.44	.68	280	3.31a	.40	39	3.53*	.39	120
National Modern	3.12a	.85	41	3.20a	.83	280	3.27a	.74	95	3.84*	.82	120
Local Traditional	3.23a	.75	41	3.19a	.75	280	3.34a	.60	95	3.64*	.61	120
National Traditional	3.45a	.80	41	3.48a	.77	280	3.51a	.73	95	3.95*	.74	120

Note: Group 1 = Mathematics and Sciences; Group 2 = Applied Science and Mathematics; Group 3 = Social Science; Group 4 = Liberal Arts.
*p < .05
a = Mean that is significantly smaller than the starred mean.

Table 2

Factors Related To Attitude Toward Minorities

Factor #	Factor Name
1.	Resentment of perceived achievements of by African American people (Resentch)
5.	Beliefs about inter-racial interactions (Antirace)
6.	Appreciation of contributions by women (Contribu)
8.	Reinforcements for achievements and accommodation in the classroom (unapprec)
9.	Feelings of displeasure due to minority presence (Resentpr)
10.	Beliefs in equal access (Beliefeg)
Factors Related to Self-Confidence	
2.	Personal status and potential as a student (Confide)
7.	Feelings of security in the classroom (Insecure)
Factors Related To The Campus Environment	
3.	Availability of environmental reinforcements (Security)
4.	Potential for Sexual Harassment (Harrass)

Table 3

Mean, SD, and t-Values of African American and White Student Responses on Factors Related to Attitude and Self-Confidence

Factor	Race	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig.
Resentech	African American	1.90	.56	-16.18	.01
	White	2.96	.65		
Antirace	African American	1.73	.69	- 6.48	.01
	White	2.32	.92		
Resentpr	African American	2.09	.67	- 5.35	.001
	White	2.48	.73		
Beliefeq	African American	3.03	1.09	3.72	.001
	White	2.62	1.08		
Confide	African American	4.19	.72	2.92	.01
	White	3.96	.76		

Note: See Table 2 for definition of factor names.